

The Wright House

"Merino Hill"

Wrightsville, Monmouth County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-526

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer  
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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"Merino Hill"  
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Owner and occupant: Henry H. Wright, R.F.D. Allentown,  
New Jersey

Dates of Erection: Original frame unit about 1735,  
rear extension about 1770, mansion house 1810,  
office building (store house) 1832 per date-  
stone

Architect: Unknown

Builders: (owners) (1) Robert Lawrence and William Clark,  
(2) Hon. Samuel G. Wright, 1781-1845, the  
mansion house, 1810\*

Present Condition: Original, well maintained

Number of Stories: Two and one-half over cellar in  
older unit; three and one-half over cellar  
in mansion house

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - stone masonry  
Exterior walls - frame in older unit, brick in  
mansion house, stone in office building,  
ice house and smoke house  
Interior walls - brick party wall and frame  
partitions  
Chimneys - brick, built into inside of  
exterior wall  
Roof - gable on older unit, hip on mansion  
house, both slate covered, gable on office  
building wood shingled

Historical Data:

Mr. W. L. Wright of Lincoln University, Chester  
County, Penna., under date of 1st November 1940, writes

\*Brass knocker on front entrance door is engraved  
S. G. Wright

us as follows. (quote) The main house was built in 1810 by my great grandfather, Samuel Gardiner Wright, son of Caleb Earl Wright. His wife was Sarah daughter of Robert Wright from whom she inherited the property. Robert was the son of David who purchased the land from William Clark. The family came probably from New England and settled at Penny Hill, New Jersey, later called Wrightstown, near where Camp Dix is now located. Samuel G. Wright(a) the builder of the main house, was a merchant and lived on Front Street in Philadelphia. The house was built for a summer home. He was greatly interested in agriculture in all its phases. He travelled widely in the South and West and brought in blooded stock to the New Jersey farm, horses from Kentucky, etc. The name of the farm, Merino Hill, comes from his being the first to bring in the Merino sheep, I believe. At the time of his death he was congressman-elect, never having taken his seat. He was quite an intimate friend of Henry Clay and of several of the political and industrial leaders of his day, who were at times his guests at Merino Hill. The marble busts in the grounds and house were purchased by him at the sale of general Moreau's effects at Morrisville (Pa.), I think. Robert Wright did not die until 1819, but I am sure the house was built by his son-in-law Samuel G. Sarah, his wife died at the age of 99 in 1885. My grandfather, Harrison Gardiner Wright, whom I remember well, was born in the year the house was built. The family then lived in the house still standing by the road on the farm next toward Allentown, which was for many years afterward in the Wright family. The office building was erected as a store house for supplies for the furnaces at Lakehurst, I have always heard. The David Wright

(a) Wright, Samuel Gardiner, a Representative from New Jersey; born in Wrightstown, N.J., Nov. 18, 1781; was mainly self-educated; engaged in mercantile pursuits in Phila., Pa. with a country place near Imlaystown, N.J.; owned several iron furnaces in N.J. and Del.; was elected as a Whig to the 29th Congress, and served from Mar. 4, 1845 until his death near Imlaystown, Mon. Co., N.J., July 30, 1845, before the assembling of Congress; interment in the East Branch cemetery near Imlaystown, N.J. (Bibographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927, publ. 1928, p. 1732)

referred to (b) as the builder of a forge at what is now Lakehurst, formerly Manchester, I think was the father of Robert Wright and grandfather of Sarah Wright. He died in 1791.

The facts pertinent to the history of the ownership of "Merino Hill" as given above have been verified as follows from a search of the title in the public records of Monmouth County.

Originally a tract of 2100 acres on Doctor's Creek in Monmouth County was granted by a patent of 24 February 1698 from the Lords Proprietors of the Province of East New Jersey to George Willocks of Perth Amboy, Middlesex County, who by his deed of 16 September 1708 conveyed the same to Richard Salter of Freehold in the first named county for 900 Pounds. The last named grantee conveyed to John Lawrence also of Freehold Township, by deed of 19 October next, a portion of that great tract, being 580 acres bounded west by Robert Burnet's land, north by Cattail Brook, east by Robbins' land and south by Buckhole Brook bog and by land of James Cox and lying "at or near Crosswicks," Monmouth County, "with all manner of housings, buildings, orchards" etc.

John Lawrence abovesaid, of Freehold Township, conveyed the same 580 acres in that place to William Lawrence of Middletown Township in the same County, by

(b) David Wright's or Federal Forge and Furnace or Dover or Manchester Furnace, Ocean County, N.J. On the old Hurrican Brook or Horicon branch of Toms River, David Wright and Caleb Ivins in 1789 erected a forge which became known as "David Wright's Forge" as Ivins soon relinquished his interests in the Works. Site of same has been located south of the Baptist cemetery, Lakehurst. Wright sold the works to John W. Godfrey in 1795, the name then lately changed to Federal Furnace, and it was abandoned in 1855. (C.S. Boyer, Early Forges and Furnace in New Jersey, publ. 1931, pp. 254-256.

deed of 17 June 1710. This grantee, being still of Middletown, passed the same to his son Robert Lawrence of Freehold Township by deed of 11 December 1722. The property of this grantee was seized and sold by the sheriff to John Clark by deed of 29 June 1759, and from him it descended to his son William Clark as heir-at-law. The last named, being of Upper Freehold Township\*, and supposedly occupying this tract, conveyed it to David Wright of the Western Division of the Province of New Jersey by deed of 27 April 1770, in consideration of 1220 Pounds, 19 shillings and 6 pence, describing it as then being 291 acres "after one acre of land whereon the Meeting House stands is deducted"(c) and excepted but including "all manner of the woods, undorwood, mines, minerals, water" etc. No house is mentioned in this conveyance(d).

David Wright# of Burlington County, New Jersey, the grantee abovesaid, by his will dated 27 September 1784 devised "unto my son Robert all the Plantation I purchased of William Clark in Upper Freehold in the county of Monmouth, which contains about 300 acres of land," he to pay 400 Pounds to the executors within a year after testator's decease.

\* Upper Freehold Township created before 1731 from Freehold Township

(c) Upper Freehold Preparative Meeting, called Robbins' Meeting and later East Branch Meeting, responsible to Chosterfield Monthly Meeting (Quaker), had its house near Wrightsville, on this tract. (F. Ellis, Hist. of Monmouth Co. N.J., 1885, p. 633)

(d) This deed of 27 Apr. 1770, recorded in East New Jersey. Deed Book A1, p. 377, recites the title to the patentee, George Willoks, as above outlined

(#) David Wright Sr. d. 6.16.1791, his wife Sarah d. 6.30.1811 ~~ae~~ 93. Children Robert b. 10.7.1743, d. 10.25.1819; Theodosia b. 10.17.1744, m. Craig; Joshua b. 3.14.1746, d. inf.; David b. 12.1.1748, d. 5.10.1824; Aaron b. 8.26.1749; Moses b. 4.4.1752, d. 12.29.1816; Sarah b. 10.24.1754, d. 3.11.1814, m. Ivins; Elizabeth b. 3.17.1756, m. Ridgway; Joshua b. 10.3.1757, d. 12.25.1831

Robert Wright<sup>(e)</sup> son and devisee of the farm (here considered) as abovesaid, being of Nottingham Township, Burlington County, and so not occupying that farm, made his will on 17 April 1819, devising to his daughter Sarah "All my undivided part or share of a certain farm or plantation situated in the Township of Upper Freehold, Monmouth County, where I have already conveyed by deed to her two undivided fifth parts", subject to the payment of \$10,000 to my son Robert within a year after my decease.

This Sarah Wright (1786-1885) who thus came into full possession of the farm in 1819, had married her distant cousin, Samuel Gardiner Wright (1781-1845) who had erected thereon in 1810 the mansion house as an addition to the existing farmhouse, as described first above and in note (a). Having survived her husband she, as Sarah Wright of Upper Freehold Township, Monmouth County, conveyed to her son Harrison Gardiner Wright of the same place for \$15,000, by her deed of 5 January 1856, "All that Farm or Plantation whereon I now reside, known by the name of Merino Hill," in Upper Freehold. The description in the deed covers a 291 acre tract bounding on the north side of Shrewsbury Road, and excepts one acre "whereon the Friends Meeting House stands".

Harrison G. Wright who thus came into possession of the family mansion in 1856, died intestate on 12 February 1885, leaving a widow Sophia B. Right, a son Walter L. Wright and a daughter Isabel Wright then wife of Wilson Wright, which two children then became owners by inheritance. By deed of 16 March 1886 the daughter and her husband, of Upper Freehold, conveyed her interest to her brother, Walter L. Wright of Springfield Township, Burlington County.

(e) Robert Wright, son of David and Sarah, married Ann Harrison, daughter of Thomas and Sarah, 13th of 2nd mo. 1783 at Upper Freehold, per records of Chesterfield Mo. Meeting. (N.J. Archives XXII, 673).

Walter L. Wright abovenamed, evidently occupied "Merino Hill" thereafter, as he is described as of Upper Freehold in his will dated 26 March 1908, proved 7 November 1910, in which he devised the residue of his estate to his daughter Bessie G. Wright and his son Henry H. Wright equally. Subsequently, by deed of 11 September 1919, the last named purchased his sister's half interest and he remains as owner and occupant of "Merino Hill" at the time of our survey of its impressive mansion house in December 1938.

Reference:

Search of title in the public records of the Secretary of the Province and in those of the counties of Monmouth and Ocean by Oscar F. Benjamin, research editor, reported 2 February 1940

Lewis D. Cook  
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams  
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.  
District Officer

11/12/40 12/11/40